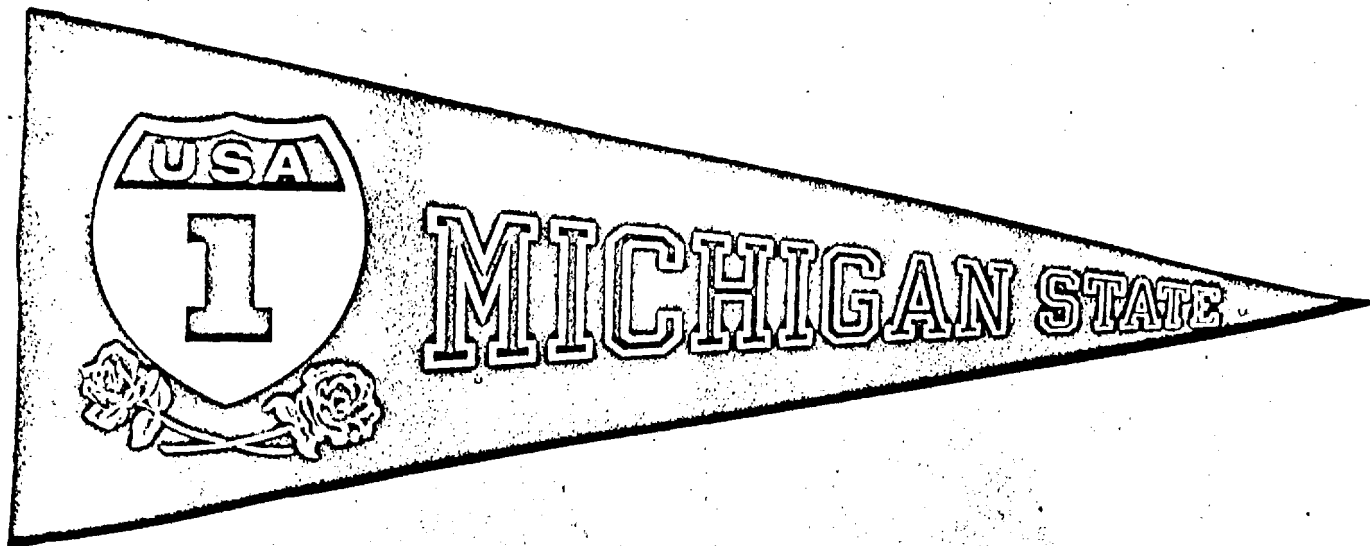


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The university on the make

Introduction

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1958, I cut my vacation short and rushed off to San Francisco to meet the four leading police figures of South Vietnam. Among them they controlled the Saigon police, the national police and the VBI, South Vietnam's equivalent of the FBI.

Within an hour of their arrival the youngest, a nephew of Ngo Dinh Diem, conspiratorially drew me aside and informed me that one of the others was going to kill the eldest of the group. The story he told possessed plot and counter-plot. In essence, Michigan State University was being used to invite these men to the United States under the auspices of its foreign aid contract in Vietnam. The

dirty deed was to be done prophylactically in the States, uncluttered by any complicating factors in Saigon.

At a time when relations between Diem and the U.S. were already strained, the whole story might have been a trick to embarrass Washington. Or else my informant's facts could have been straight, and failure to take action would have been equally embarrassing. The upshot was some nocturnal maneuvers and a cross-country flight designed to separate the quartet by forcibly hospitalizing the supposed target on the pretext he showed signs of T.B.

Nothing ever came of the episode. The intended target lived long enough to be executed by Diem's successors for having assassinated a variety of political prisoners himself.

The question is, why was I, of the Department of Economics at MSU, involved in such ugliness?